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TALES THAT ASTONISHED

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#1 FREE

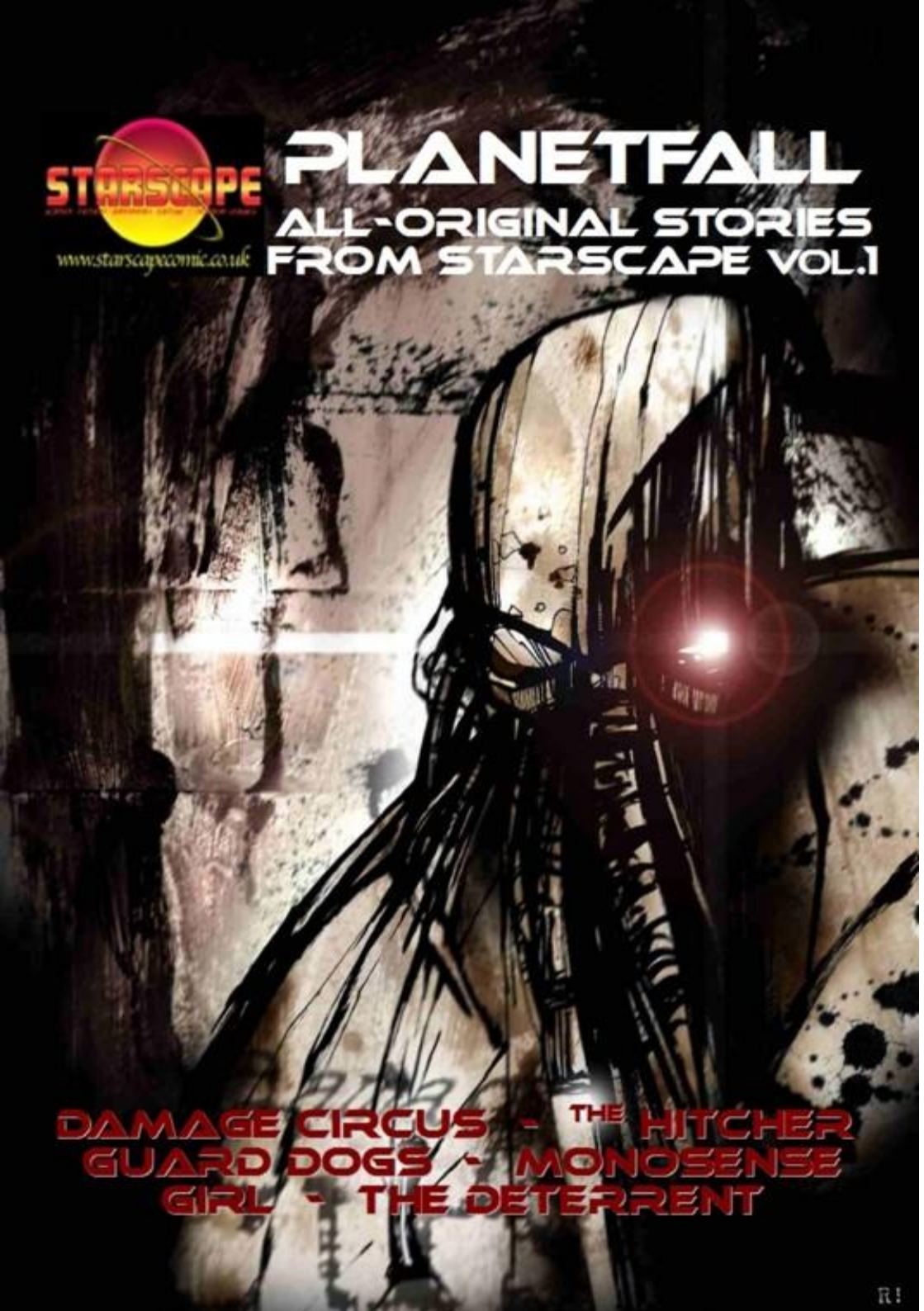
Classic comics from the UK and US reviewed

IN THIS ISSUE: THE AVENGERS / DEFENDERS WAR

2000AD's
DAN DARE

JACK KIRBY'S
NEW GODS

PLUS: COMICS FROM JULY 1940
HULK V. THOR
DEATH OF THE GHOST RIDER


STARSCAPE
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PLANETFALL
ALL-ORIGINAL STORIES
FROM STARSCAPE VOL.1
DAMAGE CIRCUS - THE HITCHER
GUARD DOGS - MONOSENSE
GIRL - THE DETERRENT

Tales That Astonished is in an A5 format and can be printed without distortion at home and read easily on tablets. To read on PCs/laptops, go to View → Page Display → Two-Page View. No need to zoom or scroll.

STARSCAPE SAYS...

Calling all Starkids!

Welcome to the first issue of Tales That Astonished. Let me try to explain just what this is all about. StarscapeOnline.com (and the paper version before it) has been publishing reviews for a number of years.

But Tales That Astonished is a review mag that isn't a review mag. There's no balance. There's no desire to be overly-critical. Instead, all you have is a celebration of the best in comics, whether that be Marvel, DC, 2000AD, Image, Archie or Britain's greats of Fleetway, IPC and DC Thomson. From the Golden Age to the present day.

Sometimes, the stories celebrated will be the obvious, e.g. The Coming of Galactus. These we call a **Fantasy Masterpiece**. Others will be slightly more obscure, such as Nova and the Sphinx, in **My Greatest Adventure**. Tales from Brit comics, such as Tornado's Angry Planet, are celebrated in **Valiant of Old**. There's little rhyme or reason. They're just good stories.

There will also be various features, such as **Versus**, where the ultimate battles are decided, for example Thor versus Hulk, or the Punisher against Judge Dredd. **Flicks That Time Forgot** discusses great film and TV. **The Old and the New** compares current comics with ones from the illustrious past, e.g. an issue of the New 52 against the original series. Finally, we have **This Day in Comics** looking at releases from so many years ago.

Starscape readers might recognise some of these from the past. The intention is to bring in new reviews as time goes on. And if you fancy submitting some reviews of your own, pop along to *StarscapeOnline.com* to see how.

Reach me at *comicscape@starscapeonline.com* Until then...

Keep watching the stars!

Chris Smillie
(Starchief)

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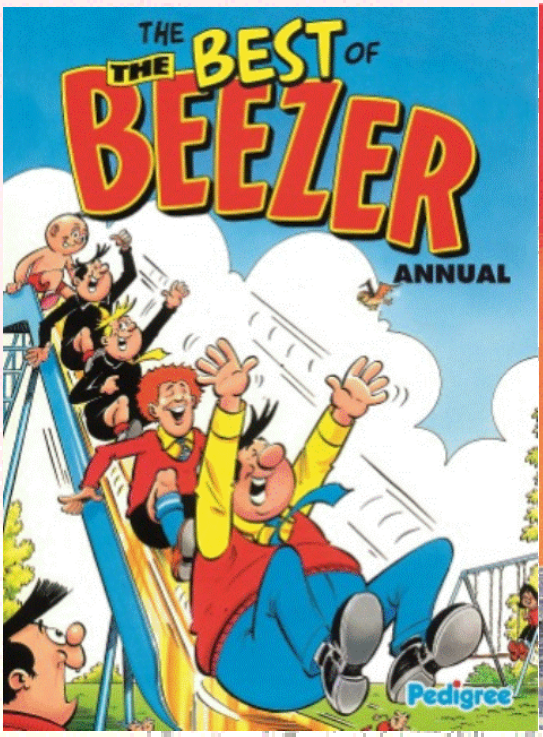
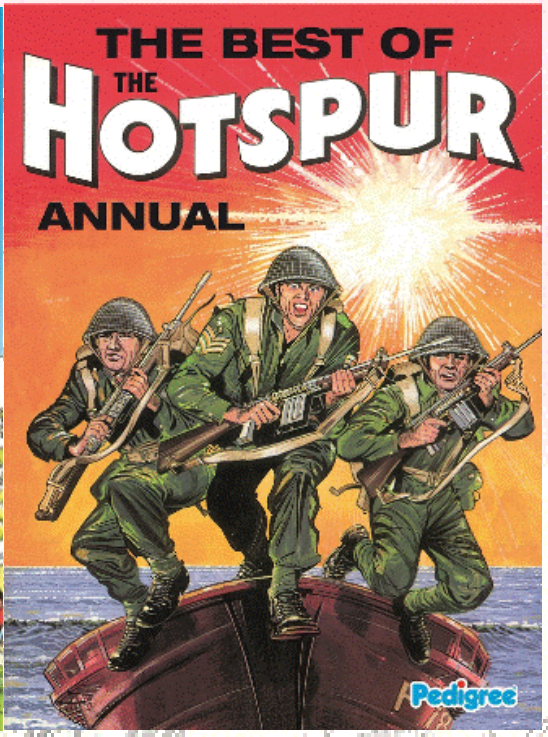
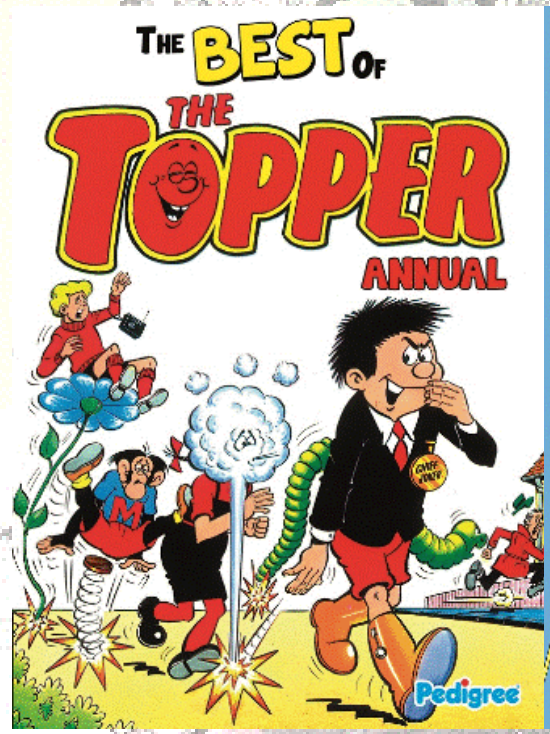
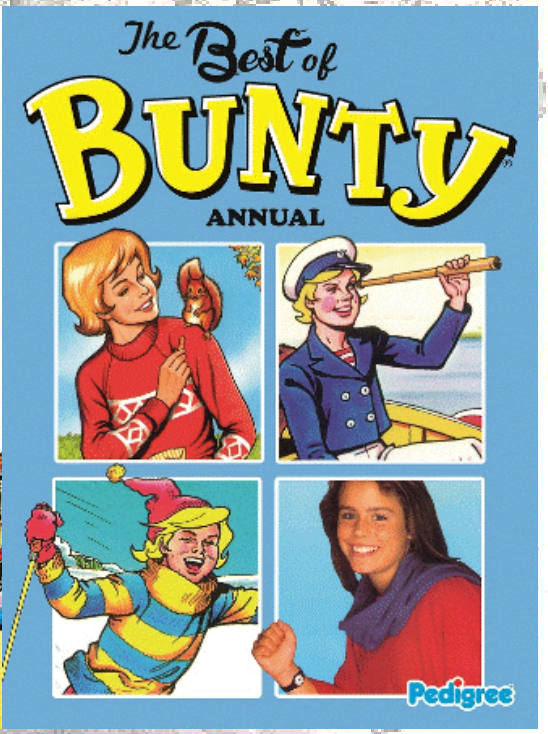




Classics from the DC Thomson archives





TALES THAT ASTONISHED

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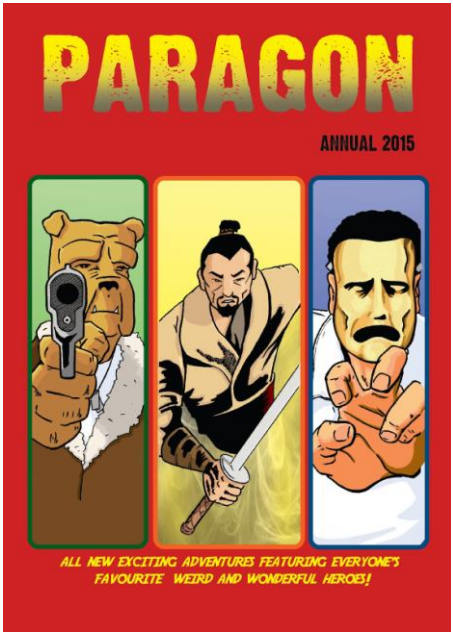


The 80s style Christmas annual featuring all your favourite weird and wonderful heroes.

Featuring Jikan - the time travelling demon hunting samurai! Plus Bulldog, Spencer Nero, L'il Ganesh and Icarus Dangerous.

FANTASY MASTERPIECE

(comics' greatest)

Avengers/ Defenders War

Earth's Mightiest Heroes and a slightly sinister non-team together to take on two of Marvel's most powerful sorcerers.

In these days of infinite this and ultimate that, it can be difficult to appreciate how exciting a myriad of your favourite heroes coming together could be. Aside from one particularly epic encounter, notable for the first proper Hulk v Thing battle (Stan and Jack's first great tale, where everyone's favourite blue-eyed boy is roundly whipped by the Green Goliath – much to every readers shock), the Fantastic Four and the Avengers rarely met. The X-Men were not especially popular, so it was no great shakes when they encountered another team.

The Defenders had only fairly recently formed…well, sort of. The Avengers had previously fought an alliance of Hulk, Sub-Mariner and Dr. Strange but that was before any idea of a permanent team had come about. Subby and ol'Greenskin had of course teamed-up to vanquish the Avengers (well, en route to the entire surface world in Namor's opinion) in the early days of yore.

I TRUST I HAVE MADE MY POINT CLEAR, HULK?
YOU ARE THE STRONGEST OF LAND CREATURES!
...WHILE I AM COMPLETELY INVINCIBLE... WHEN IN THE SEA!!

So just why would these teams battle? Well, it's all to do with the former Avenger, the Black Knight…

Loki tells of Dr. Strange turning the Black Knight to stone. Earth's Mightiest Heroes vow to rescue the Knight. But why would they believe archfiend, Loki? The Avengers discover that a team of Dr Strange

(mysterious magician), the rampaging Hulk, enemy of surface-dwellers - Namor, sometime enemy of the human race (through a misguided attempt to unite them) Silver Surfer, Valkyrie (once an alias of Thor enemy, the Enchantress) and ormer compatriot (and former villain) Hawkeye have set out to enslave the world (according to Loki) by gathering the ancient weapon, the Evil Eye.

Fair enough. But why then would the reformed heroes of the Defenders square up to the Avengers. Again, it's Loki. Dr Strange detects his influence, believing this to have brainwashed the Avengers. So we then come to some great, if at times mismatched, battles. The Surfer mistakenly almost kills the Scarlet Witch, thus preventing in-love Vision from chasing after him. Iron Man then takes on his old friend and adversary, Hawkeye. Much to everyone's surprise, the archer wins (ok, he has to run away quickly but he still wins!). The martial arts then take on the mystic arts as the warriors of Black Panther and Mantis fight Dr Strange. Never in doubt this one really. In fact, it only lasts as long as it does due to Strange holding back! Next come Marvel's two golden age heroes and former allies in the Invaders. Sub-Mariner is at his arrogant best and is only stopped, at the first attempt, by Japan's hero, Sunfire. After a great battle, Captain America attempts to flee but not quick enough. Namor catches up with Cap and pretty much orders him to give over the Eye before he takes it. Sensing the better part of valour, Cap concedes. But not before some truths are told. The Avengers and Defenders unite!

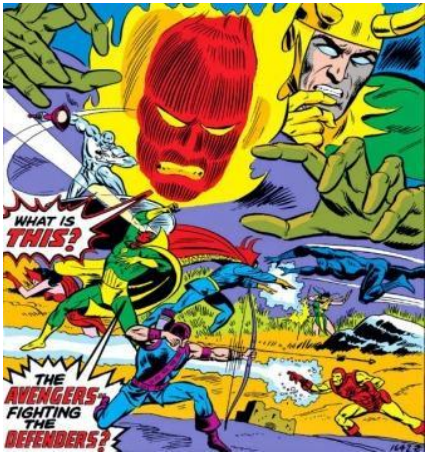
Almost. Unfortunately, no one's told Thor or the Hulk.

THE MONSTER, HAVIN TWO MORE SITS—BEGINS UNCOIL!— REACHING HIS BRAWNY ARMS—TWIST OUT— AND ARE MET BY THOSE OF THE THUNDER GOD!
MAMMOTH MUSCLES BULGE AND FLEX ALONG THE MIGHTY LENGTHS OF TWO HALF-MYTHICAL FORMS— AND BOTH SEEM TO A STANDSTILL!

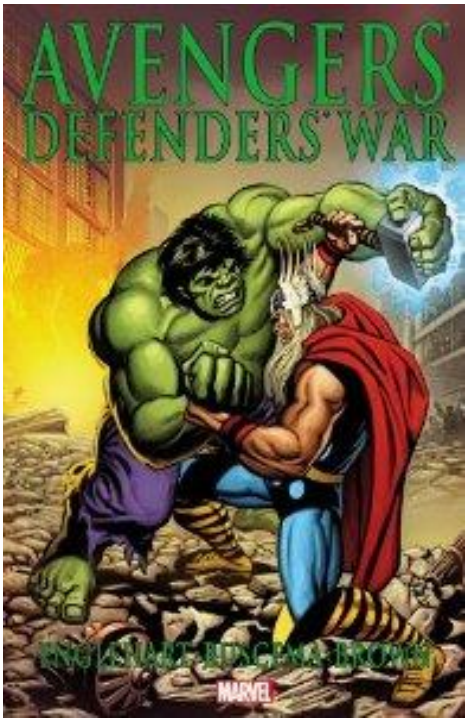
Some great moments here. The Hulk turning away, believing he's beaten the Thunder God, before Thor emerges as strong as ever. Hulk catching Mjolnir with a look of panic, as he is unable to lift the hammer. All this before a tense face-to-face trial of strength before

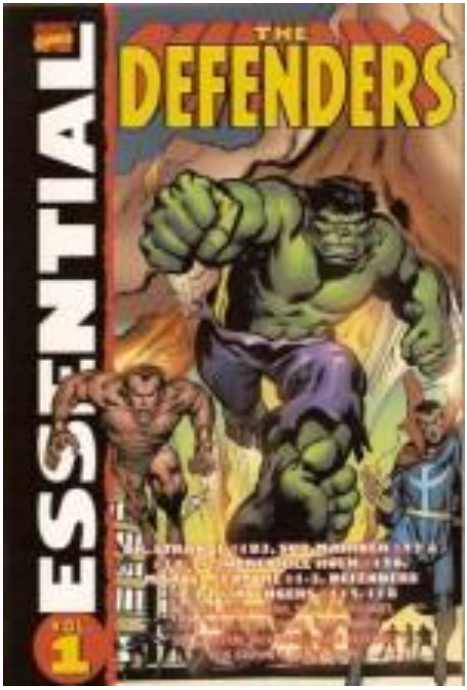
being stopped by the assembled heroes.

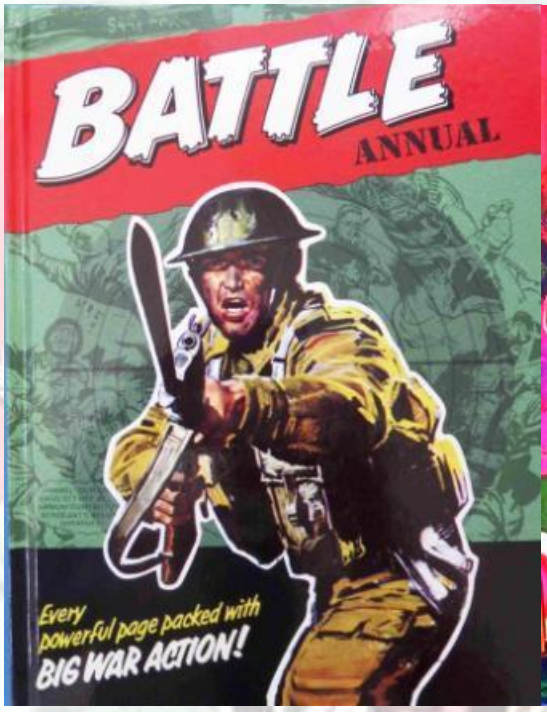
And this is only the opening salvo! The heroes then unite to battle Dormannu in another dimension, as he warps the Earth through the theft of the Evil Eye. As our Earth alters, we see the likes of Spider-Man, Ghost Rider, even Man-Thing, EVEN DRACULA fight to keep control of Earth.

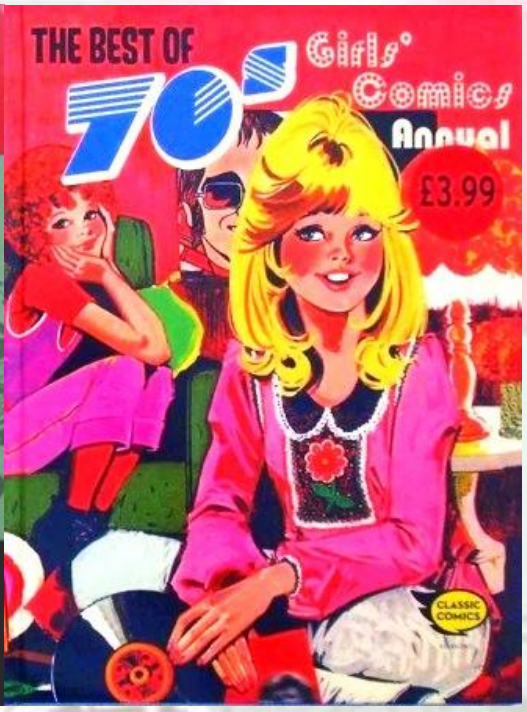


Infinitely good! The real ultimate team-up!



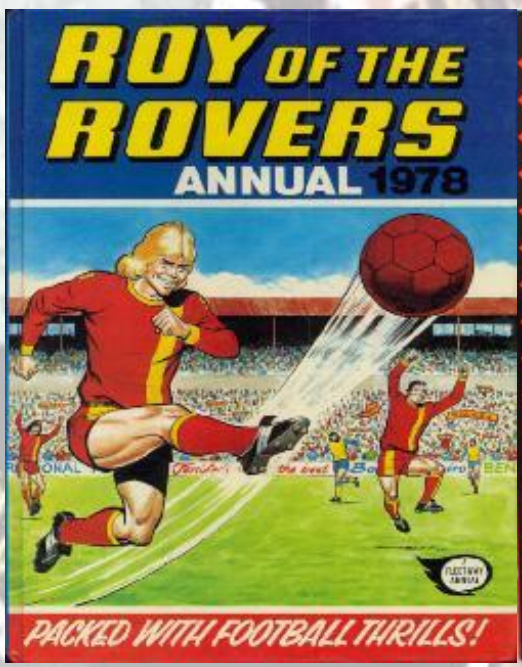


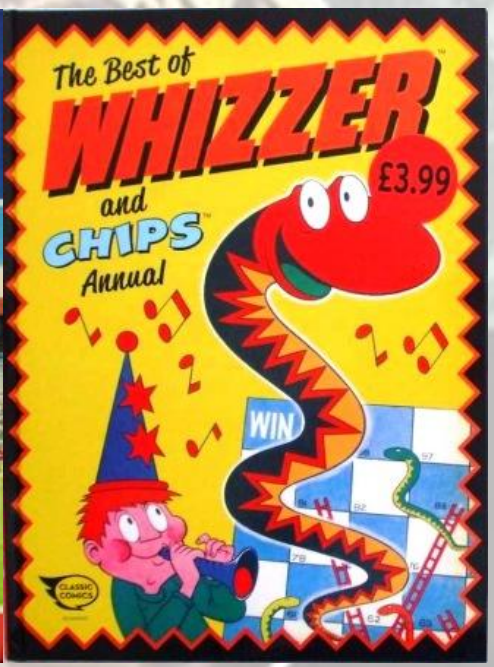




Fleetway's back!!

Annuals for 2015!





VERSUS

(deciding comics' greatest battles!)

Mighty Thor v Incredible Hulk

First of, this isn't a gathering of evidence from comics history. It's fairly easy to find issues where the Hulk looks stronger (such as Thor 385 where Hulk takes everything Thor can possibly throw at him). But then again, it's also fairly simple to get issues where Thor has the upper hand (e.g. Avenger vol.2 #5 where Hulk begs Thor to stop, even though that means Hulk gets the sucker punch in). So, instead, rather than what appears to be a writer's preference, let's examine the evidence over the whole course of their character development.

I've seen many contributors before state that the Hulk starts from a lower point of strength but, due to rage, becomes stronger. Hmmmm, I'm not so sure on this point. It's been pointed out that 'the madder Hulk gets, the stronger Hulk gets', then that makes his strength virtually unlimited. I disagree. First of all, that sounds like hyperbole to me. Y'know, it's kinda true but more to impress rather than an irrefutable law. Also, rage isn't infinite. You can only get so mad and that's it! And it usually comes in waves rather than some uncontrollable ongoing hatred.

As for Thor, it's less than unusual (in fact, I get a little bored of this plot device), where Thor is getting trounced but somehow, just when mortals would give up, Thor would rise and be victorious. See Thor: Vikings for a great example. In this, the Odinson is continually shown to be weaker than the ghostly Norsemen only to finally realise that actually he's stronger than the whole Viking ship put together(!) And that's not even counting Thor's warrior spasms.

So strength for strength, it's very difficult to have a definitive answer...and that's just the way I like it, thank you very much. So what other advantages do they have? First of all, if Thor's fired up by the Odinpower, then it's no

contest, so let's not go there. This is classic Green Hulk and Son of Odin Thor.

For fighting technique, that must go to Thor. The Thunder God has been battling for centuries, whilst Hulk is a newcomer to the scene. Also, being far more intelligent, Thor is able to see openings and manipulate the behemoth into situations. Hulk? It's really all about fists. No technique, whatsoever. So, Thor on that one.

What about any specialities? Hulk's secret weapon? Difficult to say he has one really. I guess, the biggest weapon he has is his sheer stupidity. Hulk just finds it difficult to realise he's beaten. Drop a mountain on him and he'll get back up. Introduce him to Eternity and the Emerald Behemoth will think 'I can take him'. He is a force of nature. An irresistible force. Also, so what if innocent bystanders are killed and injured. They are not even in the Hulk's thoughts...but Thor? Goldilocks would sacrifice himself instantly to save any passers-by. Hell, he'd probably sacrifice himself to save Bruce Banner!

Naturally, Mjolnir, Thor's enchanted hammer, is Goldilocks biggest advantage. With this, the only thing Hulk fears (as he once stated), Thor is able to pound Hulk with considerably more force. But that's only the start of it. Thor is able to summon lightning strikes upon the Green Goliath. With Mjolnir, however, Thor can create airless vortexes to asphyxiate Hulk. More devastatingly of all, the enchanted hammer is able to open portals and transport objects across dimensions. Thor only need teleport Hulk into airless space, or more devastatingly, into a black hole or the heart of a sun to ultimately win.

So, on a toe-to-toe, it's a toss up. And really, this is the Hulk's only hope. Thor has far more powers than he ever uses. In a straight battle, where both are desperate to win...it's Thor hands down.

NEXT: SPIDEY v WOLVERINE

MY GREATEST ADVENTURE

(obscure but great)

Death of Ghost Rider

The final year of Ghost Rider contains some of the greatest stories in Marvel history!

In my humble opinion, of course. Surprisingly the whole of comicdom doesn't necessarily realize just how wonderful these issues are. Well, I'm going to tell you why Ghost Rider is my favourite comic book character and should be yours too!

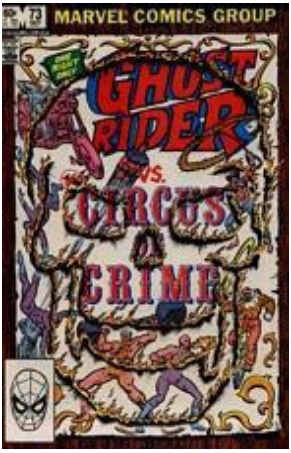
Let's start at the beginning – except that's not so easy to find! The original Ghost Rider was not the flame-headed, skull cyclist you may be familiar with, rather, he started life as a spooky-looking (though powerless and altogether un-supernatural) cowboy hero.

Originally published by Magazine Enterprises, the rumour is Marvel just stole the character!

The series, however, wasn't too successful (though it wasn't that bad – sales figures were a lot higher for a successful comic then). So The Ghost Rider faded from view to be eventually replaced by Satan's cyclist – and dropping 'The'. Night Rider (or Phantom Rider) – as The Ghost Rider was now known – did make a come back, notably in a time-travelling Avengers epic but also in a couple of nice team-ups with the'new' GR.

Created by Gary Friedrich and Mike Ploog with Roy Thomas (hmmm, well, maybe - Friedrich successfully sued Marvel over the film rights, claiming it was all his idea), Johnny Blaze attempted to save his 'adopted father' by selling his soul to Satan (later revealed as Mephisto), however, the Devil reneged on the deal. Only the love of Roxanne saved Johnny from eternal damnation. Instead, Blaze was cursed to become a frightening-looking demon with magical strength, speed and hellfire! I know what you're thinking – not much of a curse, huh? And that's the way it stayed for most of the issues. There were hints that occasionally Blaze wasn't in full control when in demon form but only in the final year of his comic did that really

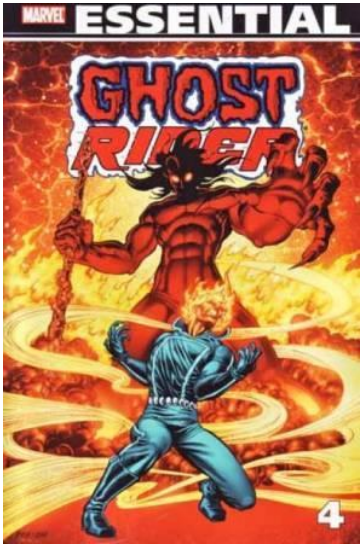
come to the fore.



Ghost Rider 72 and 73 are the greatest Marvel comics ever!!! In these issues he meets also-rans, the Circus of Crime. To save the fair in which he works and its people, Blaze is forced to relinquish control to Ghost Rider. In turn, GR does not hold back at all. Not only does the Circus of Crime lose badly, GR savagely beats them - turning one of them into little more than a vegetable and another with intensive first degree burns. However, in doing so, the Spirit of Vengeance punishes an innocent man and Blaze struggles to regain control. Deep in Blaze's subconscious, Ghost Rider (with help from Dr Strange foe, Nightmare) explores his origin, eventually finding out he himself was cursed for challenging Mephisto. His punishment? To be subordinate to a human!

J.M DeMatteis then takes us through the otherworlds of the mind and Hell as Blaze and the demon battle for supremacy. The demon, Zarathos, eventually frees himself from Blaze and engages in a battle with an old foe, the Man With No Soul, Centurious! Despite his hellfire having no effect (it burns the soul you see) and his life-force fading through having no contact with Blaze, Zarathos drives himself on, though blind and in intense pain to the final showdown.

And there was the promise – 'after this issue – you will never see the Ghost Rider again!' We did of course but he was never bettered!



VALIANT OF OLD

(Britain's best!)

Dan Dare and the Hell-Planet

A truly titanic tale from 2000AD's first leading character (nope, not him) - DAN DARE*!

Who can tear a building to shreds with his bare hands?
ANSWER INSIDE...
2000 AD
8p
DARE
THE EYGGS FROM PLANET ZIRCON ARE ON THE RAMPAGE FOR THEIR MAIN FUEL SUPPLY
A TOP THRILL
DAN DARE

Way back in 1977, us kids were devouring sci-fi in the form of Star Wars. Boy, did that make an impression at the time. It's difficult to describe how much if you weren't there. Sure, movies are still successful, still exciting and probably as well attended. But Star Wars came in a virtual desert of boys adventure sci-fi. Star Trek had long gone and films, great though some may be, just weren't written for the sci-fi adventure fan. Add to that, the new fashion for toys, rulers, pencil cases, lunch boxes etc etc and there was a new wave for a new generation.

(*although MACH1 was actually the most popular!)

I believe it was Pat Mills, who also realised such a turning point in the media was occurring. Pat and Fleetway IPC had already written a number of tales 'heavily influenced' by movies in the weekly comic, Action. Hook Jaw was of course Jaws; Dredger, Dirty Harry and Rollerball became Spinball. So why not capture the sci-fi zeitgeist? This time, though, they had a further ace to play - an already famous comic character lying dormant.

Dan Dare, as you probably know, was originally in the 1950s Eagle comic. A paper whose influence on adventure weeklies in the UK cannot be overstated. But what did the kids of the 1970s know of that? Well, DD had dragged on in Lion comic until the 1960s and the Eagle annuals of the early 70s. But it's more the tales of dads, uncles and the like that kept the memory alive. So when the comics we were reading - Buster, Krazy, Battle - announced he was returning, we were excited about reading of this oft mentioned hero, not to mention that green-skinned alien with the forehead disc!

A look at forums and articles will suggest DD was not particularly good. Nonsense! That view is partly a combination of the final Dare

story (the Cosmic Claw) and a very true assessment that this Dare was nothing like the Eagle version (well, maybe the eyebrows!). Could never imagine the original Dare killing spacers that were in the way - he'd have spent the time talking to them to make them understand. But that first story v the Biogs is quite simply a great boy's adventure!

To sum up, Dare is awoken from suspended animation to find his former associates dead and his features slightly changed (though that doesn't happen in the beginning, or even in this first story!). That stops any history getting in the way! After losing his comrades to organisms over Jupiter's red spot, Dare is court-martialled. A desperate breakaway leads to Dare stowing away on a ship guided by Martian Captain Monday. The ship is attacked by the creatures from the Hell Planet, with Dare and Monday eventually being taken captive.

Taken to the red spot of Jupiter in one of the living ships, Dare and Captain Monday, find out the horrible truth for the abductions. The creatures of the Hell Planet are slaves to a race known as the Biogs (living spaceships)...and the Biogs need a source of energy...human flesh!!!

Dare, with a living axe, leads a battle on Jupiter, along with Monday, to disable the giant 'mother biog'. Eventually escaping into space, the cosmic duo is terrified to discover the aliens on Jupiter were merely an advance force. The full flotilla of biogs has arrived and is intent on invading Earth!

THEN DEATH SHALL BE MY FATE, DARE. ONLY I REMAIN ABOARD THE ODYSSEY—ONLY I CAN SAVE PLANET EARTH FROM THE BIOGS' SPACESHIPS! ACTIVATING STAR DRIVE —NOW! ODYSSEY IS ON...
THE FINAL
SUN TRIP!

Dare leaps into a lightly armed capsule to attempt some disablement but it's too little too late. Instead, Monday persuades the assembled alien force to follow him, making the ultimate sacrifice, into the heart of the sun. A truly heroic death, with a later 2000AD feature on Mars showing Monday being honoured with a statue.

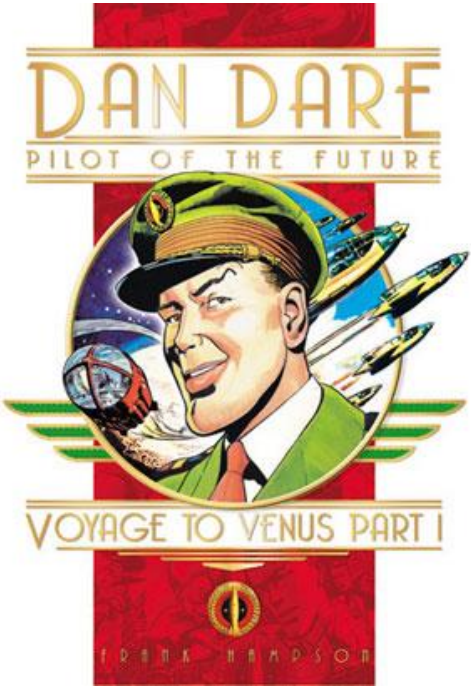
And it taught me something. As a young lad at the time, I'd never really experienced death. Monday had become my favourite character at the time. Similar to deaths in the

glorious Charley's War, I waited in vain for what felt like (and probably was) months for Monday to come back. So really this was my introduction to loss. And you know, there's still a little part of me that hopes he survived somehow...somehow.

Martian Mirror
FOREIGN NEWS
PRESIDENT NIMA OF VENUS IN CRISIS TALKS
DIPLOMATIC TENSION INCREASES P.9
DUST STORM STRIKES
MONDAY OF MARS LIVES ON!
HAKKZARI
SAND SKIING LEAGUE CUP
VI-KIN MARTIAL ARTS CHAMP, WAG-NAR "The Secret of my Success"
QUEEN ELIZABETH XII: WALKABOUT IN BRADBURY CITY

2000 AD
KIDS OF EARTH... WELCOME TO YOUR FUTURE!
8p
FOLLOW ME INTO THE SUN... YOU WILL SHARE THE DEATH OF A MARTIAN WARRIOR!
TOP THRILL
DAN DARE

Titan Books has a number of the original Eagle adventures. Dynamite recently produced a Garth Ennis run closer to 2000AD's version of Dare.



2000AD's Dare has Rebellion owning the comic but the Dan Dare Corporation controlling the character. However, an agreement now sees a future for a reprint.

I, for one, can't wait!

At the end of 1994, Alex Ronald wrote and drew his first comic, with the intention of getting noticed by 2000AD. One year later, he was a regular artist for the comic, being the artist for mega-hero Judge Dredd.

RED SANDS is an enthralling tale of colonists, tyrants and anti-heroes set in a futuristic 'gold rush'.

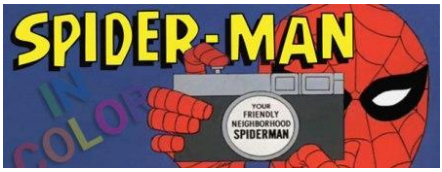
STARSCAPE

www.starscapecomic.co.uk

FLICKS THAT TIME FORGOT

(when tv was great)

Spider-Man (1967)



The Beatles, Andy Warhol, Woodstock. All indisputable icons of the Sixties. And just as much as any of those was Marvel Comics. Not just the comics, mind you. As with Adam West's Batman, the 1967 animated Spider-Man was a landmark in televisual entertainment. The images of swinging Spidey in the swinging Sixties, plus the groovy theme-tune has burned in to the world's consciousness. And, rather nicely, the folks at Clear Vision have re-released a DVD featuring the Web-Slinger up against his most fearsome and (in)famous foes.

The reproduction on the DVD, both audio and visual, is pretty near perfect. The stories are in chronological order, but due to the timing of the original 1967 release, its episode after episode of the top Spidey villains.

The DVD first begins with a Spidey v Doctor Octopus tale. Doc Ock manages to lure Peter Parker to his hideout to trap Spider-Man. Although, that begs the question, how did Doc know that Parker and Web-Head were one and the same? Betty Bryant is an essential part of the plot. Remember Betty? She was Peter's love interest in the days before Gwen Stacy and well before Mary-Jane. Parker was still trying to get dates, much less deal with the after-effects of a murdered loved one.

The next adventure sees the Web-Slinger up against beings from the coldest planet (well, we thought it was a planet then), Pluto. To be honest, the adventure is a little silly. Something not lost on jolly Jonah Jameson, who decries having to print a story about 'a flying iceberg'. What does make up for the poor story is the animation, which features a number of wall-crawling scenes - Spidey has never looked so good as when crawling like the creature he took his powers from.

Episode 2 (bizarrely each episode consists of two completely separate stories) features "is it a lizard?" "is it a man?" "I'm a lizard-man"

(actually it's just the Lizard). Sent to Florida on a photographic mission to capture pics of the Lizard, Spidey seeks advice from Dr Curt Connor, who secretly is...aw, you guessed. The Lizard has always been a little unusual in that Parker sympathises with Connor, being cursed with super-powers. Rather than defeating him outright, Web-Head is just as concerned with protecting the Lizard from himself. One major difference from comics, Dr Connor is two-armed, rather than an attempt to cure himself of his lost arm.

The Electro adventure holds a lot of nostalgia for me. I had this on some ancient reel-to-reel as a boy, so it brought back some great memories. I've never really understood how Electro became such an also-ran in today's Marvel. A man that commands electricity? That surely ranks a greater power than the proportionate strength of a spider or some super-soldier serum.

"The Sky Is Falling" shows the Vulture (who seems already acquainted with Web-Head) controlling New York's bird population, aided and abetted by Spider-Man (well, according to Jameson that is!). Next up, comes the first Spider-Slayer robot, complete with J Jonah Jameson's face on the cover - as first seen in Amazing Spider-Man #25. For a robot, the Spider-Slayer looks too free-flowing. Still, nice to see Parker using some science to defeat his foes, giving JJJ a breakdown at the same time!

Next up, another favourite villain of mine and another creation of JJJ. Yes, it's the madness of the Scorpion. Again, despite being stronger that Spider-Man, plus with deadlier weapons, the Scorpion has, like Electro, become a B-rate villain. Unfairly in my opinion. Well-handled though is the Scorpion's descent in to madness and loathing of Jameson. So much so that JJJ becomes a supporter of Web-Head (well, when forced to). Just when it looks as though this is to be the best adventure of them all, the ending is so simplistic, it really sticks in the the throat. In reality, probably the most entertaining part is Spidey's real terror of the time - asking out Betty Bryant (so close Petey, so close...).

It's another of the Sinister Six next, with the Sandman. JJJ accuses Spidey of being a diamond thief...and to be honest, the evidence

is on his side. Sandman has always been a tough villain to beat and it really takes some luck for Web-Head to win this battle...plus some careless talk by Sandy.

"Diet of Destruction" featuring a power-eating giant robot is best left forgotten. Certainly, the worst episode in the series. 'Nuff said!

The final episode features the menace of the Green Goblin...even though Jameson believes it's just Spidey in a new costume! A very well told tale where the Goblin develops some supernatural/hypnotic powers, complete with some Egyptian horror. The Goblin has the cheek of the Joker combined with the weirdness implicit in his crazy costume. In the end, Parker has to fight sorcery with sorcery in a terrific culmination of some great nostalgia.

All this and still they can't draw eight-legs on his Spider-Man costume motifs (or spell 'jewellery' in the opening credits!).

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REBELLION

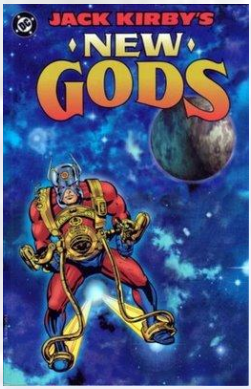
SHOWCASED
(series reviewed)
New Gods

KIRBY IS COMING! boomed the adverts. Could it be the legendary artist who had created (or co-created) many of the greatest characters in comic history was leaving Marvel to work for the Distinguished Competition? Jack Kirby of Silver Surfer, Iron Man, Thor, the Fantastic Four, Doctor Doom, Captain America and oh so many more, had quit mighty Marvel to return to former employers DC.

Why? Well, most of that can be set firmly at the door of the gleaming silver skimmed alien - the Silver Surfer. At the height of his powers, Kirby had sent Thor into new galaxies, whilst brought the Fantastic Four into new levels of storytelling with the introduction of the Watcher, Galactus, the Inhumans, the Negative Zone and, of course, Chrome Dome.

In Jack's eyes, the Silver Surfer was completely alien in every way. A very different life force to humans – almost messianic. He was Kirby's most precious creation – and it broke his heart when Stan Lee decided to use John Buscema on the new solo comic book. Lee had very different ideas to Jack. The Surfer became very human – there was a home life, a love interest and a desire for combat. So Jack left.

To persuade Jack to work for them, DC offered him total control. Art, plots, script – everything! And what ground breaking title did Jack ask to work on? Not the JLA, Superman or Batman, but Jimmy Olsen!?!? Ever the caring individual, Jack would only accept a title that had no regular artist. So KIRBY IS HERE! And pretty soon came the hint of things to come. Rumours of an anti-life equation and battles on other, higher planets. Then, in the blink of a proverbial eye, the Fourth World was here with the New Gods at its forefront.



So who are the New Gods? Well, they live on New Genesis, where, under the rule of the High Father, all is peace and light. Children and

learning are praised whilst fun and laughter are everyone's ambition. Apart from one. Orion! An angry god, who seeks battles and violence. Wielder of the Astro-Force! Actually, more a cross between Thor and the Silver Surfer with an anger none of Jack's previous heroes ever had.

In opposition to New Genesis was Apokolips – a dread place whose inhabitants suffered due to their own awful cruelty to each other. And at the head of this damned planet stood Darkseid! Probably Kirby's most famous DC creation, old Stone Face was determined to rule New Genesis and was going to use the Earth as a means to an end.

Orion meets the challenge on Earth and is determined to battle Apokolips foes, in particular Kalibak the Cruel, with the aid of some freed Apokolips captives. Unfortunately, they are a motley bunch of Earthlings, ranging from the young teen to the middle-aged family man. In awesome battles, Kirby relates the story of incredible battles and the realization that Orion is Darkseid's son. Sounds a little familiar? New Gods, it's rumoured, was an inspiration to Star Wars.

And the other characters? Firstly, there was a race of bug people condemned to behave like the bugs on Earth – all except one. Forager! Who sees more to life than the endless scavenging. Then there's the antithesis to the Surfer – the Black Racer! The harbinger of death on a pair of skis!

So if it was so great, why was the comic cancelled? The reason given was poor sales – although that's now in dispute. At the heart of it though was: these are Marvel characters and this was a DC Universe. Orion, a mighty fighter in the Marvel universe could not compare to the Big Blue Boy Scout who, at that time, could move moons! Who needs a scowling Orion when you have a scowling Batman? Perhaps, if the Fourth World was kept just as that, we could have seen the conclusion to this saga.

The New Gods have been collected into a rather stunning Fourth World Omnibus. John Byrne (and friends) Tales of the New Gods is also worth reading.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

(same title, different volume)

Silver Surfer #7

Silver Surfer #7 1969

I loved the first volume of the Silver Surfer. Despite this breaking Kirby from Marvel as Lee teamed-up with Buscema to make an all-too human version of Norrin Radd.

The story is basically a reworking of Frankenstein. The big difference being this time the monster is an evil version of the Surfer. Story-wise, it's not brilliant. A little silly even. However, the writing is unbelievably good. Pathos. Drama. Heart-rendering action. It's Stan Lee at his best.

The script is more than set off with Buscema's incredible art. Kirby did found Marvel but I would argue Buscema provided the template for the majority of the next 20 years.

Silver Surfer #7 2014

This is the first Silver Surfer I've read of this series. It's certainly a little different to the Buscema / Lee version. In fact, it's different to most comics I've read.

From what I can see, Norrin is less of a human than the classic series. Nothing wrong with that. In fact, it is quite in keeping with Kirby's version. Here we have the Surfer roaming the spaceways with an Earthgirl in tow – one Dawn Greenwood.

Both seem to be enjoying themselves, exploring the endless unknowns. It's an interesting concept. Let's see where our imagination can go. Although having hicks and an atomic shotgun wedding is simply silly. But as a plot, this works.

The art is interesting. Not really my cup of tea, being brutally honest, but it holds my attention. The script though isn't great. It seems to be written by a child. Not for children mind you. The script is just too simplistic. There's little to read. Nothing too deep. A scratched surface.

The Upshot

The plot is actually much better in the 2014 version. Not being Earth-bound, as in 1969, means the Surfer can go to the limits of space.

That being said, it's still a poor second to the original. The writing Lee puts into the script is way above the Slott/Allred version. Interesting that Allred is, there is no comparison between him and the mighty pen of Big John.

So, it's a hands-down win for 1969.

This Day in Comics
July 1940

Action Comics #26
Adventure Comics #52
All-American Comics #16
Amazing Mystery Funnies #22
Blue Ribbon Comics #5
Crack Comics #3
Crackajack Funnies #25
Crash Comics Adventures #3
Detective Comics #41
Doc Savage Comics #1
Fantastic Comics #8
Feature Comics #34
Fight Comics #7
Flash Comics #7
Four Color #8
The Funnies #45
Funny Pages #39
Future Comics #2
Hit Comics #1
Keen Detective Funnies #22
Marvel Mystery Comics #9
Master Comics #4
Mickey Mouse Magazine #58
More Fun Comics #57
National Comics #1
Nickel Comics #5
Nickel Comics #6
Pep Comics #6
Planet Comics #7
Popular Comics #53
Prize Comics #5
Slam-Bang Comics #5
Smash Comics #12
Super Comics #26
WHIZ Comics #6
Wonderworld Comics #15
Zip Comics #6.

What a year 1940 was!

Ok, chances are you were not around then but you will certainly remember some of the characters from the time.

Superman had not long debuted in Action Comics #1. The astonishing success led to a variety of wannabees and future greats from Marvel, DC and many more long-lasting and fly-by-night publishers.

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The first great comic of Marvel actually took place in, you guessed it, July 1940!

By far, Marvel's two biggest characters were the original Human Torch and the anti-hero, Namor, the Sub-Mariner. And an epic event took place 70 years ago – they met!

Quite rightly named 'Battle of the Century', Marvel Mystery Comics #9 saw an amazing clash for New York waged between the Golden Age flaming android, Jim Hammond and the Avenger of Atlantis.

Marvel, for years, largely ignored their early history, with the submerging of New York by Namor a lost memory until a quite breath-taking re-imagining by Alex Ross in the graphic novel, Marvels.

It was actually the ONLY Marvel comic of the month.

National Periodicals, forerunner of DC Comics, was the big player of the time. Batman was still appearing in Detective Comics, whilst Superman was still in Action Comics, much like today. A big difference though was, they were not the only ones!

Detectives, crime-fighting magicians, strongmen, pirates and private eyes all served to make up stories in these comics.

Similar back-ups also appeared in Flash Comics (home of Hawkman and, you guessed it, the [Golden-Age] Flash), More Fun Comics (the Spectre and Doctor Fate) and Hourman's Adventure Comics. Some amazing covers mind you.

All-American Comics #16 was much the same, only this issue introduced a major character into comics. Inspired by the legend of

Aladdin and his magic lamp, the ring-bearing Alan Scott first appeared as Green Lantern!

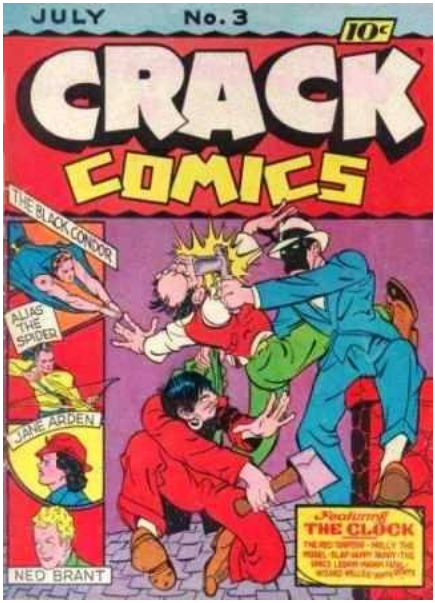
Elsewhere, the biggest selling hero of the Golden Age, Captain 'Shazam' Marvel faced off against his nemesis, Doctor Sivana in Whiz Comics #6. Other Fawcett comics included Master Comics featuring...nope, not Captain Marvel jr., he didn't appear until Whiz #25...Masterman! The other big Fawcett hero of the day was Bulletman who appeared in Nickel Comics #5 AND #6 in the same month!

Archie Comics was then known as MLJ Publications. Not surprisingly since Archie Andrews was still a few years off being created! MLJ was instead a superhero line. Pep Comics', The Shield really should get more credit for being the first flag-wearing hero, predating Captain America by over a year.

Another big favourite of the MLJ line at the time was Steel Sterling, who appeared in Zip Comics. John Sterling, after some ludicrous experiment involving drugs and molten steel, became the immensely strong hero, known as 'The Man of Steel'. I know what you're thinking: “no wonder he's not around: DC must have sued” - not so! Superman's nickname was actually 'The Man of Tomorrow'. So it was in reality, The Big Blue Boy Scout

that took the name from Steel Sterling, rather than the other way around!

Quality Comics most famous creation, Plastic Man was still a year off, with Police Comics #1 not appearing until 1940. However, Crack Comics was the home of The Clock – sometimes regarded as being the first superhero. Basically, a crime-fighter in a suit with a simple face mask and some nifty gadgets, he was actually published in 1936. The Clock inspired a certain Will Eisner to create The Spirit.

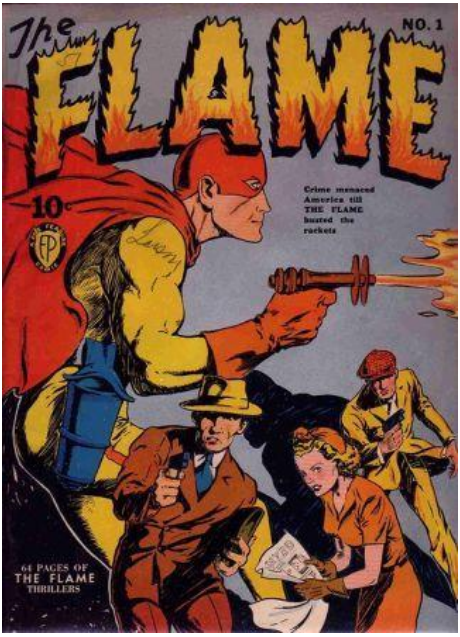


The Clock shared central billing in Crack Comics with later Freedom Fighter, the Black Condor., with Doll Man appearing in Feature Comics. Meanwhile, the future leader of the Freedom Fighters, Uncle Sam, was actually making his debut over in National Comics #1. Little used Quality character, the Red Bee also made his debut in Hit Comics #1.

Dell, who were mostly successful with TV properties in the 1960s, produced pulp heroes, Ellery Queen, in Crackajack Funnies and Dick Tracy in Super Comics, plus some minor heroes in The Funnies and Popular Comics.

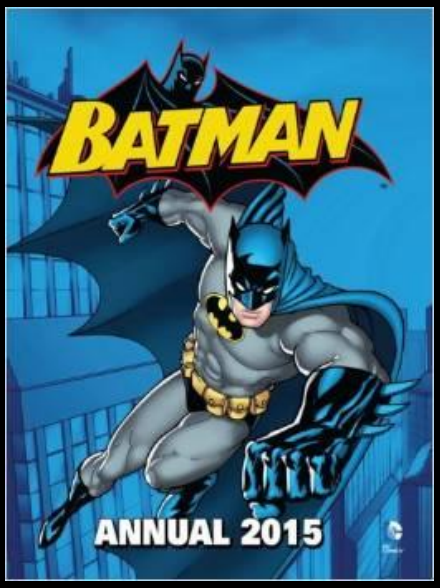
Another pulp hero became a comic book 70 years ago when the Man of Bronze got his first start in Doc Savage #1. Meanwhile, the Lone Ranger was in issue 3 of Future Comics.

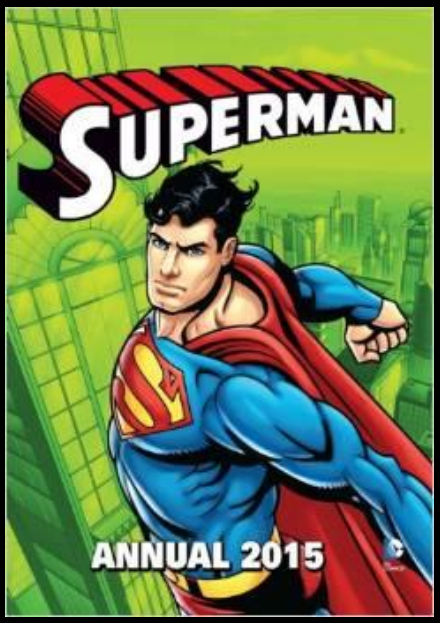
Centaur had the first 'super archer' out in The Arrow, in Funny Pages, whilst The Masked Marvel was duking it out in the quite awful named Keen Detective Funnies #22.



Other minor heroes of the month included Blue Streak in Crash Comics Adventures, Power Man (no relation) in Fight Comics and The Flame (who also had his own Summer Special) in Wonderworld Comics. The latter published by Fox Features Syndicate (no relation again) who also had the Fantom (sic) of the Fair in Amazing Mystery Funnies.

MORE YESTERDAYS NEXT TIME IN TALES THAT ASTONISHED!





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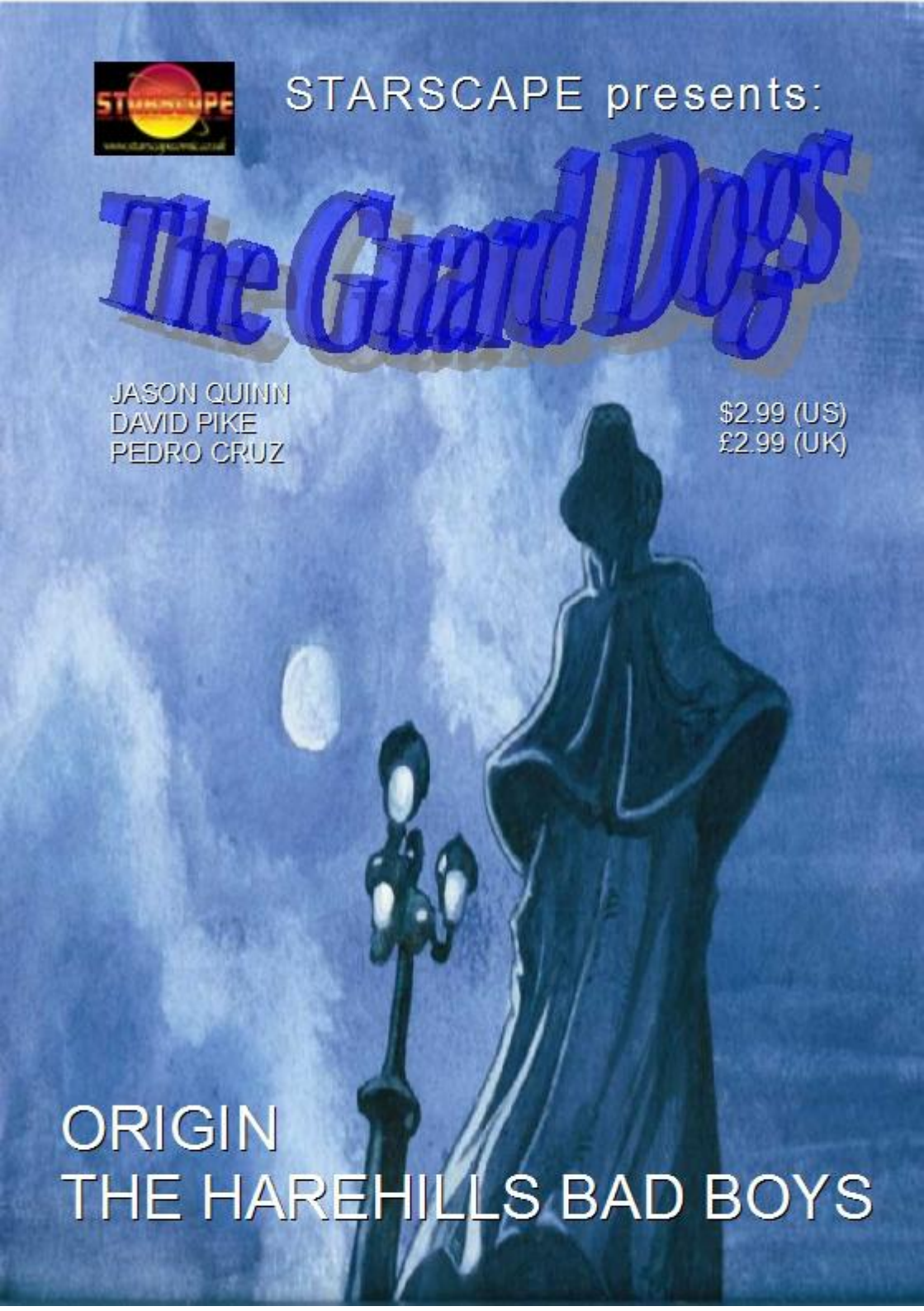

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